DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 216 154 CE 032 211

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TITLE A Study of Factors Which Precipitate Adult Enrollment in a College Degree Program.
INSTITUTION Wisconsin Univ., Green Bay. Assessment Center.
PUB DATE Apr 82
NOTE 53p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Adult Students; Bachelors Degrees; Educational Research; *Enrollment Influences; Higher Education; *Incentives; *Motivation; *Student Characteristics; Surveys; *Undergraduate Study

ABSTRACT

An investigation of events that cause adults to enroll in traditional college or university degree programs studied the general demographic characteristics of adult students, events that trigger adults to enter or reenter a bachelor's degree program, and the relationship between barriers to education and triggering events. In phase 1, 20 students participated in interviews whose results provided the basis for development of a questionnaire. Phase 2 was the pilot test of the instrument. In the full survey phase data from 906 returned surveys were analyzed. Results showed that 72% of the students were between ages 25-34, 61% were married, and 62% had children. Two-thirds were employed. Nearly two-thirds had attended college previously. Barriers to earlier enrollment included job and family responsibilities, lack of interest, and availability of funds. Adults' primary reason for pursuing a college degree was to improve and expand career opportunities. Triggers to college enrollment were job dissatisfaction, encouragement from others, available funds, children entering school, and realization that a college degree was necessary to achieve a personal goal. There appeared to be a strong relationship between reasons for delaying college entry and triggering events. (The survey is appended.) (YLB)

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A STUDY OF FACTORS WHICH PRECIPITATE ADULT ENROLLMENT IN A COLLEGE DEGREE PROGRAM

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April 1982

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am greatly indebted to members of the Urban Corridor Consortium Task Force on Part-time and Commuter Students who provided invaluable assistance throughout the project: Stu Rubner, Task Force Chair and Director, Community Student Services, University of Wisconsin-Parkside; Janet Brown, Director, Adult Learning Laboratory, University of Wisconsin Center-Waukesha; Al Loehndorf, Director, Student Services, University of Wisconsin Center-Fond du Lac; Thomas Segnitz, Assistant Dean of Students, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh; and Jean Shanahan, Director, University Special Student/ Summer Session Office, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Without their cooperation, the successful completion of this project would not have been possible.

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A STUDY OF FACTORS WHICH PRECIPITATE ADULT ENROLLMENT IN COLLEGE

INTRODUCTION

At least thirty major studies of the adult learner have been conducted during the last decade to gather information regarding the characteristics, needs, goals, learning styles, interests and barriers to participation in learning (Cross, 1980). This research has established several points which bear directly on the present study.

During the mid to late 1970's several major surveys reported that the number of potential adult students vastly exceeds the number of adults who actually do enroll in formal educational programs (Carp, Peterson and Roelfs, 1974; Cross, 1978; Johnstone and Rivera, 1965). Carp, et. al. (1974) found 46% of adults to be in the category of "would-be" learners who are not enrolled now but expressed an interest in further learning. This percentage is substantially higher than the 30% of the adults surveyed who were active learners. Like-wise, Aslanian and Brickell (1980) cite an example from a 1978 Gallup poll: 41% of adults polled responded that they would be interested in taking special courses or training, yet only 31% had actually ever enrolled in adult education courses. Although definitions of what constitutes participation in learning differ from study to study, the existence of a rather wide gap between expressed interest and actual participation has shown up in most of them. It appears that predisposition or interest in further education is not enough to explain which adults will participate in further education.

Characteristics of the adult learner have been studied to determine who participates in various types of learning. In general, these studies have found that the single best predictor of participation in learning activities is prior level of educational attainment (Anderson and Darkenwald, 1979 and

Cross, 1978,). Moreover, several surveys have identified demographic variables that profile the type of adult likely to enroll in college: young (25-34), high income, living in an urban area, employment in business and professions, to name a few descriptive factors. However, as Aslanian and Brickell (1980) have pointed out, "demographic characteristics of learners are correlated with the causes, but are not themselves the causes, of adult learning" (p. 47).

There have also been numerous investigations of the educational goals and objectives of adult students (e.g. National Center for Education Statistics, 1972, 1975) which typically reveal the importance of career goals (to attain specific skills that will be useful on the job or to develop a new career) and self-fulfillment goals (to complete a degree). However, as pointed out in one recent study (Hendrickson, 1979), the barriers, goals, and demographic characteristics of adults enrolled in college are not significantly different from "interested" adult non-students. Therefore, if these variables are the same for both groups then the question becomes: Out of the large number of potential adult learners, what triggers some of them to enroll in a degree program while others remain "potential" students?

Research on "Triggers" to Enrollment. Two recent studies have moved beyond the barriers and goals studies and have questioned adults about the catalyst or event that precipitated their enrollment. Helen Astin's (1976) study of women in continuing education programs found several important catalysts in the women's decision to enroll. More than half of the 1100 respondents cited "the program's offerings" as the most important catalyst. Encouragement from others, job dissatisfaction, boredom at home, lessening of home responsibilities, availability of funds, family/marital problems, geographical move, and serious illness or death in the family were other catalysts cited.

In a more comprehensive study, Aslanian and Brickell (1980) explored "life changes as reasons for adult learning" by surveying a national sample of

adults. After interviewing nearly 750 "adult learners," they concluded that most of the events that triggered learning were related to changes in one's career or family situation. Respondents indicated that many career-related events such as promotion, transfer, job loss or new job had triggered continued learning. Events in family life such as marriage, divorce, pregnancy, relocation or retirement also triggered many adults to return to school. A small percentage of adults in the study also mentioned that events related to changes in health, religion or citizenship had served as a trigger to further learning.

MAJOR OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Astin's survey and the interviews described by Aslanian and Brickell provide a wealth of information about what triggers adults to learn. However, three factors related to either the design or the method of data analysis used in the studies limit policy implications for colleges and universities. First, the "learners" who participated in the studies encompassed a large, heterogeneous group of adults, including individuals who were enrolled in a wide array of credit and noncredit programs. Secondly, although Aslanian and Brickell interviewed a representative sample of learners, their statistical description of triggering events was presented only in general terms. For example, they did not report percentages of adults who were triggered by specific events such as the youngest child entering school, loss of a job, etc. Astin was somewhat more specific, however, her study is limited by the fact that the respondents included only women in continuing education programs.

Finally, although the Aslanian and Brickell study analyzed the data collected in terms of relevant demographic characteristics, their broad definition of "learner" limits the generalizability of results. Consequently, the relationship between such factors as age, sex, marital status and employment status and triggering events could not be ascertained specifically for the adult degree seeker. Past research, then, has paved the way for a more

detailed investigation of the events which cause adults to enroll in traditional college or university degree programs. The present study was designed to address four major questions: (1) What are the general demographic characteristics of the adult student seeking a bachelor's degree in a traditional educational program? (2) What triggers adults to enter or reenter a bachelor's degree program? (3) Do triggering events vary with an individual's goals, specific demographic variables or other life circumstances? (4) Is there a relationship between barriers to education and triggering events?

METHOD

First Phase. Because of the limited amount of information available regarding what serves as a catalyst or trigger for an adult who returns to college, it was felt that a series of semi-structured interviews would provide the best vehicle for gathering some initial information.

Thirty adult students from the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay were randomly selected for participation in this first phase of the project. Students were selected from a roster of adult students who were matriculated undergraduates during the Spring 1981 semester. From this sample of 30 students, 20 agreed to participate in a 30-45 minute interview. The results of these interviews were analyzed and provided the basis for the development of the four-page questionnaire.

Second Phase. During this phase of the project, another random sample of 30 students were surveyed by mail to pilot test the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to gather relevant demographic information including the age, sex, marital status, occupational status and educational history of the respondent. Information regarding perceived barriers to earlier completion of a degree program, educational goals and the catalyst or event which

directly triggered the respondent's return to school was also collected. The format and wording of the questions were based on the results of the preliminary interviews and, whenever possible, were the same as those used in previous studies.

Full Survey Phase. After appropriate modifications of the survey instrument had been made, a sample of 1343 adult, degree seeking students were selected from six campuses of the University of Wisconsin System. On each campus "adult degree seeking student" was defined as an individual 25 years of age or older as of the first day of the Fall, 1981 semester. Moreover, to be included in the study, the individual had to be a matriculated, undergraduate student who had not previously been awarded a bachelor's degree.

The six campuses were selected primarily because of the large proportion of adults enrolled in their campus degree programs. In addition, they provided a good mixture of both small and large campuses (600 to 25,000) serving urban, suburban and rural populations. Two campuses offer only two year degrees; the other four are four-year campuses. Five campuses, including UW-Green Bay, UW-Milwaukee, UW-Oshkosh, UW-Parkside, and UW-Waukesha, provided a serially selected sample of 250 students each. At the remaining campus, UW-Fond du Lac, the entire group of 93 eligible adult students were included in the study.

During the last week of October, 1981, questionnaires were mailed to the entire sample of 1343 adult students. From three to four weeks after the first mailing, a second qustionnaire was sent to all nonrespondents. In mid-December, a third questionnaire was sent to all respondents who had not returned either the first or second questionnaire.

Of the original 1343 adult students surveyed, 1025 returned a questionnaire for an overall response rate of 76%. Only ten surveys were returned as undeliverable. One hundred nineteen questionnaires were subsequently excluded

from the study when it was found that respondents did not meet the criteria of "adult degree seeking student." The majority (N=96) were eliminated from the study because they had already received bachelor's degrees and were seeking a second degree. Twelve were excluded because the respondents were 24 years of age, and the remaining eleven surveys were eliminated when the respondents indicated they were "specials" and not seriously seeking a degree. Therefore, out of the 1025 surveys returned, 906 were included in the data analysis.

RESULTS

Characteristics of the Adult Student

In spite of the fact that the present study was limited to adults who were matriculated undergraduates, the adult students proved to be a highly diverse group that did not be easily fit a demographically homogeneous profile.

Age and Sex. As can be seen in Table 1, nearly three-quarters of the students responding to the survey were between 25 and 34 years of age and nearly two-thirds (62%) of the entire group of respondents were female. The sex distribution of students did, however, vary with age. Within the 25-29 age range the number of females only slightly exceeded the number of males, while among students over 35, female students outnumbered male students 3 to 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents By Age and Sex

Age	Men	Women	Total	(%)
25-29	182	205	387	(43%)
30-34	97	166	263	(29%)
35-39	33	82	115	(13%)
40-44	18	63	81	(9%)
45+	13	40	53	(6%)

Respondents ranged in age from 25 to 69 with a median age of 30. Women tended to be slightly older, with a median age of 28 for men and 31 for women.

Marital and Family Status. Table 2 provides a percentage distribution of respondents by marital status and sex. About two-thirds of the questionnaire respondents were married, 21% were single and had never been married, 17% were divorced or separated and 1% were widowed. While the proportion of married men and women was the same, there were more single men than single women, while women were much more likely than men to be divorced or separated.

Table 2. Marital Status of Respondents

Marital Status	Men	Women	Total
Married	62%	60%	61%
Single	28%	16%	21%
Divorced	9%	22%	17%
Widowed	0%	2%	1%

Along with the large proportion of students who were married, a comparable number also had children, including 46% who had school-aged children (as shown in Table 3). Female students were more likely than men to have children, but less likely to have preschool children. Specifically, while 30% of the men had preschool children, only 20% of the women had children who had not yet entered school. On the other hand, women were more likely than men to have school-age children.

Table 3. Number of Children of Respondents

Children	Men	Women	Total
Children (any age)	54%	67%	62%
Preschool (5)	30%	20%	24%
School Age (6-18)	34%	53%	46%
Over 18	5%	13%	10%

Employment Status. Given the age and marital status and family responsibilities of the average adult student, it is not surprising that most of the respondents were employed at the time of the study, including 43% who were

Table 4. Employment Status

Employment Status	Men	Women	Total
Unemployed	23%	18%	20%
Full-Time Homemaker	1%	22%	14%
Part-time	16%	27%	23%
Full-time	60%	33%	43%

employed full time (Table 4 above). Men and women differed significantly across the four employment categories. Sixty percent of the men were employed full time compared to 33% of the women. However, more women than men were employed part time. Approximately one-fifth of both groups considered themselves unemployed at the time of the survey.

Current Occupational Status. As reported above, most of the respondents were employed at the time of the survey. Of the nearly 600 adult students who reported that they were employed, 447 provided job titles which could be classified using the U.S. Department of Labor's, Dictionary of Occupational Titles. Because of the complexity of the DOT classification system and the limited amount of information available, classification was limited to the nine primary occupational categories. In addition, because of the relatively small number of people engaged in agriculture and factory work, percentages in those categories were collapsed and recorded as a single entry.

Table 5. Occupational Status of Respondents

Occupational Category	Men N=189	Female N=258	Total N=447
Professional, Tech., Manager.	35%	42%	39%
Clerical and Sales	19%	38%	30%
Service Occupations	15%	14%	15%
Agricultural, Processing, Machine Trades, Benchwork, Structural Work, Miscel.	31%	6%	16%

As can be seen in Table 5, women were somewhat more likely than men to be in the professional, technical, and managerial occupations. They were also twice as likely to be in clerical and sales occupations. At first glance it appears somewhat surprising that proportionately more women than men are employed in professional, technical or managerial occupations. A cursory examination of job titles in this category, however, suggests that this is due to the large number of female students who are presently employed as RN's, LPN's or in other medical occupations. On the other hand, it is not surprising that there are more women than men in the clerical and sales areas. Job titles in this category include a large number of clerks, secretaries and other office workers.

An additional 15% of the survey respondents were engaged in associated service occupations including waitresses, janitors, gardeners, police officers, hairdressers and maintenance people. Finally, the limited number of females engaged in agricultural or factory jobs is responsible for the low percentage of the total group in those occupations. Examples of job titles in these categories include truck driver, welder, millworker, forklift operator, machine operator, etc.

Table 6. Prior Educational Attainment

Educational Level	Men	Women	Total
High school graduate	15%	22%	19%
Completed some technical school	8%	12%	10%
Received A.A. degree (technical school)	7%	4%	5%
Attended some college	61%	57%	59%
Received A.A. degree (college)	9%	5%	7%

Educational Background and Characteristics. The majority of adults who responded to the survey had attended a postsecondary institution at some time in the past (see Table 6). Two-thirds attended a college or university prior to their current period of enrollment. An additional 15% had completed technical school courses or earned an associate degree there, indicating that only 19% had no postsecondary experience. There was only a slight difference in the proportion of men and women who had attended a postsecondary institution prior to their current period of enrollment.

Respondents were also asked to indicate when they first took a college course for credit. One third of the adults (31%) had attended college immediately after high school but then dropped out. Another 18% enrolled in college between one and three years after high school graduation but had not

Table 7. Length of Time between High School and College

Length of Time	Men	Women	Total
0	34%	30%	31%
1-3 years	22%	15%	18%
4-6 years	16%	11%	13%
7-9 years	13%	11%	12%
10+ years	15%	33%	26%

completed their degree. Men and women differed somewhat regarding the length of time between high school and college with 11% fewer females than males entering college within three years after high school and 18% more women waiting ten years or more after high school graduation to attend college.

Enrollment Status. With respect to current educational status respondents were asked to indicate their present class standing and the number of credits they were currently taking. Among the adults currently enrolled in degree programs, 62% were underclassmen, evenly divided between the freshman and sophomore classes. Twenty percent of the adult students had junior standing,

Table 8. Class Standing

Class Standing	Men	Women	Total
Freshman	25%	34%	31%
Sophomore	30%	31%	31%
Junior	19%	21%	20%
Senior	26%	14%	18%

with the remaining 18% at the senior level. An examination of class standing by sex reveals that among the female respondents, a full one-third (34%) were freshmen compared to only 25% of the men. Twenty-six percent of the men and 14% of the women were seniors at the time of the survey.

Almost two-thirds (65%) of the respondents were attending school part time (11 semester credits or less), including 30% of the group who were taking between 0 and 5 credits. In contrast, 35% indicated they were taking 12 or more hours of course work during the Fall, 1981 semester.

Table 9. Number of Semester Hour Credits Taken

Number of Credits	Men	Women	Total
0-5	31%	29%	30%
6-8	26%	26%	26%
9-11	10%	10%	10%
12-14	20%	22%	21%
15-17	11%	10%	10%
18+	2%	3%	3%

The "number of credits" variable was analyzed by sex, age and employment status. There were no differences found between men and women and the number of credits carried. There was a moderate relationship between age and number of credits taken, in that students over 40 tended to take fewer credits. For example, 75% of the respondents aged 40-44 years attended school part time and 84% of the adults 45 and over attend school part time.

Finally, there was a strong relationship between present employment status and number of credits carried. Among those adults who were employed full time,

only 7% were also attending school full time. Among those learners who considered themselves unemployed, 69% were attending school full time. Fifty-six percent of the part-time workers attended school full time, while 39% of the full-time homemakers were taking 12 or more credits.

Summary of Demographic and Educational Characteristics. In examining the demographic characteristics of the adult degree-seeking student we find that nearly three-fourths (72%) are between 25 and 34 years of age. Two-thirds (61%) are married and sixty-two percent have children, including forty-six percent who have school-age children. In addition to their family responsibilities, two-thirds of the students are employed outside the home. Forty-three percent are employed full time and twenty-three percent part time. Professional, technical, clerical and sales occupations account for approximately seventy percent of the job titles listed by respondents.

Responses to questionnaire items regarding educational background and present college status revealed that nearly two-thirds (66%) of the entire group had attended college prior to their current period of enrollment. Forty-nine percent had attended college within three years after high school graduation while one-fourth (26%) waited ten years or more before enrolling in a college or university.

In spite of the high percentage of adults who had attended college in the past, we found that approximately two-thirds (62%) were underclassmen and only one in five had senior standing. Finally, the prevailing impression that most adults are attending college part time is confirmed by the fact that 65% of the respondents were taking eleven or fewer semester credits at the time of the survey.

WHY DO ADULT STUDENTS WAIT?

In addition to completing the demographic and educational background questions, the adult students were asked to indicate what factors had prevented

them from completing a college degree earlier. Respondents were first asked to rate the extent to which the reasons listed in Table 10 were "very much," "a little" or "not at all" responsible for delaying their college enrollment. A second item asked them to indicate "the single most important" reason for not enrolling or completing their degree earlier. Respondents were also encouraged to specify "other" factors which may have prevented them from returning to school and rank them using the same criteria.

Only one barrier, "wanted to or had to work," was rated "very much" responsible for delaying the enrollment of more than 50% of the matriculated adult students. Two additional factors, including "family responsibilities" and "lack of funds," were considered important barriers by at least one-third of the respondents. All three barriers can be considered situational barriers which are "arising from one's situation in life at a given time" (Cross, 1980, p. 106). Dispositional or attitudinal barriers, including lack of interest and lack of encouragement also prevented a significant number of adults from enrolling in college earlier. Only a small number of adult students cited institutionally related factors such as course schedules, locations, lack of information, etc., as important barriers.

When forced to choose the single most important barrier, more respondents

Table 10. Reasons for Delaying College Entry

Barrier	Very Much	Most Important*
Wanted to/Had to Work	58%	20%
Family Responsibilities	47%	27%
Funds Not Available	37%	12%
Lack of Interest	24%	17%
Lack of Encouragement	19%	6%
Attended Technical School	16%	3%
Military Service	14%	5%
Lack of Information	11%	3%
Illness	6%	2%
Other		6%

*Column may not total 100% due to rounding.

chose family responsibilities than any other reason. Unfortunately, with only 27% of the respondents selecting this barrier, no single factor emerged as "the" reason for delaying college entry. However, when taken together, the situational barriers of family responsibilities, work responsibilities and cost account for over half (59%) of the most important barriers. By adding "lack of interest" to the list, the primary reason for delaying completion of a college degree can be explained for three-fourths of the respondents.

In addition to the barriers listed, approximately 9% (N=86) of the respondents listed other reasons for delaying their college work. The bulk of these responses (N=39) were general attitudinal factors including lack of a specific goal, lack of confidence and immaturity. Factors related to the college as an institution such as location, poor class schedules or lack of a specific program also accounted for a large number of the "other" responses. The remaining reasons offered by survey respondents ranged from not being able to speak English to having bad experiences in college several years earlier.

Barriers to College Entry for Men and Women

For both men and women, job responsibilities, family responsibilities and lack of funds were the three reasons most frequently given for delaying enrollment in college. As Table 11 indicates, more women than men saw family responsibilities and lack of funds as an important reason for delaying their college entry. In fact, women were twice as likely as men to select family responsibilities as the most important barrier. On the other hand, men were more likely to choose job responsibilities, lack of interest and military service as a reason for not enrolling in college earlier.

Barriers and Age

The reasons respondents gave for delaying their college work also varied with age (see Table 12). Older adult students (35+ years old) were much more

Table 11. Reasons for Delaying Entry by Sex

Barrier	% Very Much		% Most Important*	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Wanted to/had to work	61	56	26	17
Family responsibilities	33	56[b]	15	34[c]
Funds not available	29	42[b]	7	13[a]
Lack of interest	27	23	21	14[a]
Lack of encouragement	10	25[c]	4	7
Attended technical school	14	16	5	3
Military service	30	4[c]	11	1[c]
Lack of information	8	14[b]	3	2
Illness	5	7	2	2
Other	-	-	6	7

[a]Difference significant at $p \leq .05$.
[b]Difference significant at $p \leq .01$.
[c]Difference significant at $p \leq .001$.
*May not total 100% due to rounding.

likely than younger adults (25-34) to perceive family responsibilities as a barrier. In fact, with 70% of the post-35 group considering it "very much" a factor and 44% selecting it as the "single most important" factor, family responsibilities account for a substantial proportion of the reasons for delay. Younger students were most likely to choose work responsibilities, family responsibilities and lack of interest as the most important barriers.

Table 12. Reasons for Delaying Entry by Age

Barrier	% Checking Very Much		% Checking Most Important*	
	25-34	35+	25-34	35+
Wanted to/had to work	57	61	23	15[b]
Family responsibilities	38	70[c]	20	44[c]
Funds not available	35	40	11	11
Lack of interest	28	17[c]	19	11[b]
Lack of encouragement	17	22	5	6
Attended tech school	15	15	4	2
Military service	15	10	5	2
Lack of information	11	13	3	1
Illness	6	6	2	1
Other			6	6

[b]Difference significant at $p \leq .01$
[c]Difference significant at $p \leq .001$
*May not total 100% due to rounding.

Barriers and Present Employment Status

Examination of responses according to the respondent's present employment status reveals that full-time homemakers were more likely to view family responsibilities and less likely to cite work as a barrier than either the unemployed or employed groups. Individuals who were presently unemployed were highly similar to the other respondents except that a larger percentage saw military service as a barrier. Part-time workers were more likely to cite lack of information as a barrier while full-time workers were significantly less likely to view cost as a barrier.

Table 13. Percentage Distribution
Reasons for Delaying Entry by Employment Status

	% Checking Very Much				% Checking Most Important*			
	Unemp.	Home maker	Part time	Full time	Unemp.	Home maker	Part time	Full time
Work, had to/wanted to	56	40	56	66	17	12	17	26
Family responsibilities	42	70	47	43	21	48	29	22
Funds not available	41	39	43	31	15	12	10	10
Lack of interest	28	22	26	23	20	15	13	18
Lack of encouragement	17	15	24	18	5	7	8	5
Lack of information	10	9	19	8	3	1	4	2
Attended tech school	11	7	19	18	1	0	4	5
Military service	23	2	10	15	8	0	5	4
Illness	10	8	8	3	6	1	2	1

*May not total 100% due to rounding.

Summary of Barriers to Earlier Enrollment. According to the results of the survey, situational barriers including job and family responsibilities deterred the largest number of adult students from completing their degree earlier. Lack of interest and the availability of funds also prevented a significant number of adults from completing a college degree earlier. Family responsibilities emerged as the major problem for women while job responsibilities and lack of interest were more frequently cited as a problem for men. For adult students between the ages of 25 and 34 no single factor emerged as "the" reason for delay; however, taken together, nearly two-thirds of the

respondents checked job and family responsibilities and lack of interest as the major barrier. Among students 35 and older, family responsibilities clearly emerged as the major reason for not enrolling in college earlier. Finally, present employment status does not appear to significantly influence the perceived barriers to education with the obvious exception of homemakers who were more likely to view family responsibilities as a barrier while job responsibilities were less likely to be seen as an important factor.

WHY DO ADULTS ENROLL IN COLLEGE DEGREE PROGRAMS?

Goals of Survey Respondents

The two step approach used to gather information about barriers was also used to determine why adult students are interested in obtaining a college degree. Survey respondents were asked to indicate their reasons for pursuing a degree at the present time by rating the importance (i.e. "very important," "somewhat important" or "not important") of the seven goals listed in Table 14. They were then asked to indicate the "most important" reason for returning to school and also given the option to specify an "other" goal they thought was important. Cyril Houle (1961) provides a classification system which places adult motivations to learn into three basic categories. The first category, the goal-oriented, refers to those individuals who continue their education in order to accomplish a fairly clear-cut objective. The second group encompasses activity-oriented learners who continue their education to broaden their social contacts and enhance their relationships with others. The third category, the learning-oriented, include those adults who return to school because they enjoy learning and seek knowledge for its own sake. When asked to rate the importance of various goals, a majority of adults felt that a very important reason for enrolling in a college degree program was "to develop a new career" (65%), "simply to learn" (61%) and "to

Table 14. Percentage Distribution of Responses
Reasons for Enrolling in College

Reasons for Enrolling	Very Important	Most Important*
To develop a new career	65	38
Simply to learn	61	17
To have satisfaction of having degree	51	11
To achieve independence and sense of identity	48	14
To advance in present career	34	15
To make contact with other people	17	0
To get away from the daily routine	14	0
Other		5

* May not total 100% due to rounding.

have the satisfaction of having a degree" (51%). In addition, 48% indicated that a very important goal was "to achieve independence and a sense of identity," while one-third (34%) indicated that "career advancement" was a very important reason for continuing their education at the postsecondary level. Clearly, the goal-oriented and learning-oriented motivations are the major reasons adults enroll in a degree program. Activity-oriented goals did not emerge as a significant reason for pursuing a degree.

When forced to choose the single most important reason for continuing their education, however, goal-oriented reasons were more likely to be selected than learning-oriented responses such as "simply to learn," and "to have the satisfaction of having a degree." The desire to develop a new career or advance in a current one was selected by over half (53%) of the respondents as their major goal. Another 14% chose "achieving independence and a sense of identity" which also reflects a strong goal orientation. Twenty-eight percent felt that "simply to learn" and "the satisfaction of having a degree" was their primary goal, while less than one percent of the respondents indicated that their major reason for returning was activity-oriented (getting away from routine, to make contact with people).

Additional Goals

Approximately 5% of the respondents listed "other" reasons for returning to school. A content analysis of these responses yielded two major categories. The first category included reasons which roughly fall into Houle's goal-oriented category and appear to be very closely related to the career-related goals specifically stated in the question. Examples include, "better income," "financial independence," "collect GI Bill" and "develop means to support family." A second group of goals which emerged can be categorized as learning-oriented goals including "keep my mind active," "gain confidence" and "utilize my potential."

Goals of Men and Women

The goals of men and women differed significantly on each of the seven goals specified. Women were more likely to cite the learning-oriented goals as being very important including "simply to learn" and "to have the satisfaction of having a degree." And "the desire to develop a new career" and "achieve independence" were also considered very important by more women than men. The only goal which had a higher proportion of men than women citing it as a very important goal was "to advance in present career."

Table 15. Goals of Men and Women

Reasons for Enrolling	% Very Important		% Most Important*	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
To develop a new career	58	69[c]	40	38
Simply to learn	54	65[b]	17	17
To have satisfaction of having degree	44	54[c]	10	12
To achieve independence and a sense of identity	32	57[c]	6	20[c]
To advance in present career	41	30[c]	22	11[c]
To make contact with people	11	20[c]	0	0
To get away from routine	8	18[c]	0	0
Other			5	2

[b]Difference significant at $p \leq .01$
[c]Difference significant at $p \leq .001$
*May not total 100% due to rounding.

When asked to select the single most important reason for attending college, similar proportions of men and women selected development of a new career, while men were more likely than women to cite advancement in present career as the major goal. Finally, achievement of independence and a sense of identity was selected by significantly more women than men which, as stated earlier, may also reflect a desire to become economically independent by seeking new career opportunities.

Goals and Age of Respondents

The percentage of adult learners who felt that development of a new career and achieving independence was very important was lower for respondents in the 35+ age category than for students in the 25-34 age group. However, a higher

Table 16. Reasons for Enrolling and Age of Respondents

Reasons for Enrolling	% Very Important		% Most Important*	
	25-34	35+	25-34	35+
To develop a new career	68	57[b]	42	29[c]
Simply to learn	60	61	15	21
To have satisfaction of degree	48	56	10	14
To achieve independence and sense of identity	52	44	14	17
To advance in present career	34	35	14	16
To make contact with people	16	20	0	0
To get away from routine of daily living	14	15	1	0
Other			3	4

[b]Difference significant at $p \leq .01$
[c]Difference significant at $p \leq .001$
*May not total 100% due to rounding.

proportion of the older learners cited the satisfaction of having a degree as a very important reasons for returning to school. The idea of learning for the sake of learning was offered by almost two-thirds of both groups as a "very important" reason for seeking a degree. Career advancement was also equally important to both older and younger adult students.

When forced to choose a single goal, career development and advancement

emerged as the most important goal for 57% of the younger adult group. In fact, the development of a new career was the only goal which was significantly higher for the younger group of adult students. Older adult students appear to be a more diverse group in that their primary reasons for learning were much more evenly distributed across the five goal-oriented and learning-oriented reasons listed.

Goals and Present Employment Status

An examination of the respondents' goals across the four employment categories reveals that career development and the desire to learn for the sake of learning top the list of very important reasons regardless of present employment status. However, in some instances, the percentage of respondents citing a particular goal as "very important" varied significantly across employment categories.

Among full-time workers, about half of the respondents cite career development as a very important goal, while nearly three-fourths of the students in the remaining employment categories felt that this goal was a very important one. On the other hand, career advancement was deemed a very important goal

Table 17. Reasons for Enrolling and Employment Status

	% Checking Very Important				% Checking Most Important*			
	Unemp.	Home maker	Part time	Full time	Unemp.	Home-maker	Part time	Full time
To develop a new career	80	76	72	51	55	35	40	31
Simply to learn	63	71	67	53	15	15	18	17
Achieve independence and and a sense of identity	56	61	57	35	15	27	17	9
Satisfaction of degree	51	55	55	47	3	18	11	12
Advance in career	19	16	33	47	7	5	8	26
Make contact with people	22	20	26	9	0	0	1	0
Get away from routine	13	23	18	10	0	0	1	0
Other					4	0	4	4

*May not total 100% due to rounding

by nearly half of the full time workers compared to less than one-fifth of the respondents who were not employed outside the home.

The percentage of adult students who had selected job or career related goals as their primary reason also varied. Over half (55%) of the respondents who were unemployed at the time of the survey selected the development of a new career as their major goal. Sixty-two percent of the homemakers chose either career development or achieving independence. The primary goals of students working part-time were somewhat more diverse; however, 40% did choose career development. Finally, 57% of the respondents working full time selected either career development or career advancement as their single most important goal.

Summary of Reasons for Pursuing a College Degree

The picture that emerges from the results of the "goals" question is that adult students by and large are seeking a degree to improve and expand their career opportunities. Although other, more socially acceptable, or what Houle calls learning-oriented motivations for seeking a degree are also deemed very important by the matriculated adult, when asked to state their primary reason for seeking a degree nearly three-fourths indicate that they want to get a new job, achieve independence or advance in their present career.

Crosstabulation of goals by sex, age and employment status indicates that whereas women, the young and the unemployed are primarily interested in developing a new career and achieving a sense of identity, men, older women and those who are employed full time usually become degree seekers in order to advance in their present careers or may participate for other learning oriented reasons such as learning for the sake of learning or to get the satisfaction which comes from having a degree.

WHAT TRIGGERS ADULT PARTICIPATION IN A DEGREE PROGRAM?

The survey was concluded by asking the respondents to indicate what events

precipitated their decision to return to school at the present time. The events or "triggers" specified in the questions (and listed in Table 18) were based on the interviews completed prior to the development of the mailed questionnaire and whenever possible, used the same terminology as Astin had used in her survey of women in continuing education programs. Once again, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which each event influenced their decision (i.e., "very much," "a little," "not at all") as well as selecting the primary trigger or single most important reason for returning to school. The option of citing other triggers was also provided.

The percentage distribution of responses to the question of what triggers adults to return to school differs remarkably from the results of the "barriers" and "goals" question in two ways. First, while the total number of adults responding to these questions was virtually the same as in earlier questions, no single triggering event was considered "very much" a factor by more than one-third of the respondents. For example, becoming dissatisfied with one's job was deemed very much a factor by only 34% of the adults, while encouragement from others (31%) and the availability of funds (28%) were the second and third most frequently cited triggers.

A second notable difference in how adults responded to the "trigger" question as compared to the others is the surprising number of adults who took the time to stipulate "other" triggering events. In fact, because the events listed in the "other" category were also frequently cited as the single most important precipitating event, only job dissatisfaction was selected by a larger number of adults as the primary trigger.

In spite of the fact that no single factor emerged as "the" trigger, after collapsing the entire list of triggers into five general categories we find that 30% of the respondents cited job or career related factors (i.e. dissatisfied with job, lost job) as the most important trigger, 24% indicated that factors related to one's family (i.e. children entered school, family or

Table 18. Percentage Distribution of Responses Triggers to Participation in College

Triggers	Very Much	Most Important*
Dissatisfied with job	34	27
Received encouragement from family, friends, etc.	31	12
Funds became available	28	11
Obtained specific information	18	6
Children entered school	14	8
Moved to community	12	4
Family or marital problems	9	4
Lost job	6	3
Serious illness, accident	4	3
Other		22

*May not total 100% due to rounding.

marital problems, encouragement) was the most important reason, 11% were triggered by the availability of funds and 6% obtained some specific information and then enrolled. The remaining respondents were triggered by a serious illness, accident, moving to the community or "other" triggers.

Other Triggers Specified by Respondents.

Although there were 213 additional triggers specified, an effort was made to identify major themes by using a content analysis technique. The analysis yielded two major categories which accounted for about 70% of the responses. The first was a realization that a college degree was necessary to achieve a personal goal (N=101). Examples of triggers which fell in this category include "a realization of what I wanted to do in life," "found a field that interested me," "made a decision about goals for the future," "finally decided what I wanted to do" and "I realized how badly I wanted to experience education."

The second major category included factors related to a specific campus (N=49). For example, a number of respondents indicated that the location, size and cost of attending a particular UW campus strongly influenced their

decision to enroll. Others provided more elaborate explanations like "my husband went to UW-(name of institution) and highly recommended the school to me" or "I would lose credits if I transferred to another campus." It is interesting to note that, although these factors are not "triggers" in the same sense as the other events listed, almost 5% felt that the institutional characteristics were significant enough to make a specific note of them.

Triggers to Participation for Men and Women

When responses are examined separately for males and females, the two groups emerge as being highly similar in some respects but somewhat different in others. For example, job dissatisfaction was the most frequently mentioned single most important trigger for both men and women. Correspondingly, for all but one of the remaining triggers listed, the proportion of men and women who indicated that a particular event was either "very much" a factor or "the most important" factor was also highly similar. The only exception was for children entering school, which was much more frequently cited by women.

Table 19. Triggers to Participation and Sex of Respondents (Percentages)

Triggers	% Checked Very Much		% Checked Most Important*	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Dissatisfied with job	37	32	29	26
Received encouragment	28	34	13	12
Funds became available	24	31[a]	12	10
Obtained information	16	20	6	6
Children entered school	2	22[b]	2	11[b]
Moved to community	14	11	6	3
Family or marital problems	3	12[b]	1	7
Lost job	9	5	4	3
Serious illness, death	4	4	3	3

[a]Difference in percentages significant at $p \leq .05$.
[b]Difference in percentages significant at $p \leq .01$.

On the other hand, when asked to rate the influence of each of the nine triggers listed, women were more likely to cite factors related to change in

their family situation or the availability of funds as triggering their decision to enroll in college. For example, "children entering school" was considered "very much" a factor by 22% of the women compared to only 2% of the men, family or marital problems was checked by 12% of the women and 3% of the men. Finally, almost one-third of the women compared to one-fourth of the men felt that the availability of funds was very much a factor.

Age and Triggering Events

Comparing the triggering events of younger (25-34) and older (35+) adult students also yields some interesting results. The proportion of younger students who indicated that job dissatisfaction was either "very much" or the

Table 20. Triggering Events and Age of Respondents

Triggers	% Checked Very Much		% Checked Most Important*	
	25-34	35+	25-34	35+
Dissatisfied with job	38	22[b]	30	19[b]
Received encouragment	31	33	12	14
Funds became available	27	30	12	7
Obtained information	16	22[a]	6	6
Children entered school	9	27[b]	5	15[b]
Moved to community	13	10	5	3
Family or marital problems	8	10	4	6
Lost job	7	6	3	2
Serious illness, death	3	8	2	5

[a]Differences between groups on these itmes are significant at .05 level.
[b]Difference significant at .01 level.
*May not total 100% due to rounding.

"most important" factor in their decision to return to school was significantly higher than for older students. Older students, on the other hand, were more likely to cite children entering school and obtaining information as "very much" a factor. Older adult students, who were more likely to have children, were also much more likely than their younger counterparts to select "children entering school" as the most important factor.

Trigger Events and Employment Status

An examination of responses to the "trigger" questions across the four employment categories also revealed some interesting similarities and differences. Job dissatisfaction, encouragement and the availability of funds are

Table 21. Triggering Events and Employment Status

	% Checked Very Much				% Checked Most Important*			
	Unemployed	Homemaker	Part time	Full time	Unemployed	Homemaker	Part Time	Full Time
Dissatisfied with job	41	21	43	30	25	18	27	31
Received encouragment	31	39	37	26	8	18	12	13
Funds became available	37	25	33	22	17	5	9	11
Obtained information	19	21	23	15	6	5	7	6
Children entered school	14	38	14	6	6	22	7	5
Moved to community	11	15	13	11	3	4	4	5
Family or marital problems	11	8	11	7	3	7	5	4
Lost job	12	3	11	2	7	1	5	1
Serious illness, death	8	3	5	2	5	4	2	1

*May not total 100% due to rounding.

the three most frequently reported trigger events, regardless of employment status. The single exception was in the proportion of homemakers who indicated that "children entered school" was the most important trigger. In fact, with 22% selecting that trigger, it was the most frequently cited trigger among full time homemakers.

Several other differences between employment groups include a much smaller proportion of homemakers citing job dissatisfaction or losing a job as a trigger; fewer full-time workers citing encouragement from family, friends, etc. and more of the unemployed and part-time employed respondents reporting the availability of funds as a trigger.

When asked to indicate the single most important trigger, the unemployed and those employed outside the home most often cited job dissatisfaction while, as indicated earlier, homemakers most often selected "children entered

school." Approximately half of the respondents in each employment category selected job dissatisfaction, encouragement or the availability of funds as the most important trigger. Fifty-eight percent of the homemakers chose either children entering school, job dissatisfaction or encouragement as the major precipitating event.

Summary of Triggers to Adult Participation in College Degree Programs. To summarize, approximately one in four adult students (27%) cited "job dissatisfaction" as the most important trigger in their decision to enroll in a college degree program. Four additional factors were considered most important by at least 10% of the entire group including (1) received encouragement from family, friends, etc. (12%), (2) funds became available (11%), (3) children entered school (11%) and (4) a realization that a college degree was necessary to achieve a personal goal (10%). Additional triggering events such as obtaining information and family or marital problems were considered most important by 6% and 7% of the total group. Loss of job, moving to the community and serious illness were mentioned by 3% of the survey respondents.

Women were more likely than men to feel that children entering school, family or marital problems and the availability of funds were very much a factor in their decision to enroll in college. Younger adults (25-34 years of age) were more likely to view job dissatisfaction as a trigger while a higher percentage of older adults (35+ years old) considered obtaining information and children entering school as very important factors. Finally, job dissatisfaction, encouragement and the availability of funds are the three most frequently mentioned triggering events regardless of the employment status of respondents. The only exception to this general finding was among homemakers who most often cited "children entered school" as the most important trigger.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BARRIERS AND TRIGGERS

As indicated earlier, no single barrier predominated among the reasons for

not enrolling earlier and no triggering event was selected by a majority as precipitating their decision to enroll. However, a close examination of the data does suggest a moderate to strong relationship between some of the reasons cited as barriers and the events which subsequently triggered a respondent's decision to enroll in college. This conclusion was reached by examining the responses to the barrier and trigger questions in two ways. First, the barriers selected as "most important" were crosstabulated with the triggering events selected as "most important." Secondly, the proportion of respondents who selected particular "barriers" and "triggers" as very important were also closely examined.

Table 22 on the following page summarizes the relationship between the "most important" barriers and triggering events. The horizontal axis includes the nine barriers while the vertical axis contains the triggering events specified on the survey form. The numbers in each cell of the table represent the percentage of respondents who selected a particular barrier and trigger as the "most important". Close examination of the percentages reveals that for eight of the nine triggers listed, a substantial proportion of survey respondents had selected as "most important" a logically related barrier. For example, 77 percent of the survey respondents who indicated that "children entered school" was the most important trigger also indicated that "family responsibilities " was the most important reason for delaying their college entry.

In addition, 26 percent of the respondents who indicated that job dissatisfaction was the most important trigger also indicated that wanting to or having to work had delayed their entry. One respondent simply stated, "I no longer wish to be a skilled laborer." Another "became dissatisfied with being just a housewife and felt a growing need to further [my] education."

Table 22. Most Important Triggers by Most Important Barriers (Percentages)

Triggers	Barriers									
	Tech. School	Mili-tary	Family Respons.	Lack of Funds	Ill-ness	Lack of Encour.	Lack of Interest	Work Respons.	Lack of Inform.	Total
Children entered school	1	1	77	3	1	3	3	3	0	100
Dissatisfied with job	6	3	23	12	2	3	20	26	3	100
Family or marital problems	0	3	50	8	0	13	13	13	0	100
Funds became available	3	7	13	34	2	4	16	19	1	100
Received encouragement	2	3	29	8	4	11	20	18	4	100
Lost job	4	4	19	19	19	7	11	33	0	100
Moved to community	6	8	17	3	3	0	17	33	6	100
Obtained information	2	6	22	8	0	8	16	18	14	100
Serious illness	0	4	13	13	13	8	17	30	0	100

Half of the respondents who selected family or marital problems as a trigger had selected family responsibilities as a major barrier and can be exemplified by the following comments offered by survey respondents:

"I originally quit school because I got married and had children. I never really expected to finish school. About a year ago I was divorced so I had to plan for a career. The only way I could continue my life style was to get a degree so I could get a decent job."

"Getting divorced and having to live on much less income prompted a reevaluation of my job and lifestyle."

"I delayed going to college for many years after I married because I felt very secure and comfortable with my life at that time. At that time my only goal was to have children and stay home. For many years I was very happy in my role, but things began to change. I began to feel I need to expand and grow. My marriage started to fall apart and so did I. Since attending college I have a whole new purpose in life and my confidence level has increased. It has helped me become a stronger more independent person."

Many adults (34%) also indicated that the lack of funds had delayed their college entry and that the availability of funds had triggered their return to school.

"I had always disliked my profession, but demands of family, job (needed income) and financial constraints kept me locked in. When the money became available, I returned to school to change directions."

"There are no grants or scholarships available for a person who has been working full time for many years. I would have had to quit my job for one year before I would be eligible. I can now only attend part-time because I still have to support myself. My tuition is paid for by my employer because I am advancing in my present career and could continue to work for them in a higher position after graduation."

"At the time I graduated from high school, I felt it was not fair to burden my parents financially. Since they were classified as a middle class family, the amount of financial aid I could have received would have been limited. Instead of school I joined the service for six years to save money for tuition and to use the GI bill for living expenses. It has worked reasonably well."

Finally, a significant number of respondents who cited having to work or wanting to work as a barrier returned to school after (1) losing their job, (2) a serious illness or accident forced them to quit their jobs or (3) moving to a new community. Examples include those respondents who wrote:

"The main reason for me attending college at such a late date is: I had

Table 23. Triggers and Barriers Checked "Very Much" as Factor

Triggers	Barriers								
	Tech. School	Mili-tary	Family Respons.	Lack of Funds	Ill-ness	Lack of Encour.	Lack of Interest	Work Respons.	Lack of Inform.
Children entered school	9	4	86	46	6	24	18	39	11
Dissatisfied with job	15	16	42	41	4	24	32	69	18
Family or marital problems	17	6	72	44	10	39	22	57	17
Funds became available	14	13	50	62	7	26	21	72	16
Received encouragement	10	12	53	42	8	20	28	59	16
Lost job	6	27	44	55	10	25	25	83	6
Moved to community	13	21	38	36	6	14	27	57	10
Obtained information	17	13	53	47	10	25	29	64	26
Serious illness	14	15	50	40	31	31	21	57	12

an on-the-job accident which left me partially paralyzed. I lost my job due to this and am now searching for a new career."

"I have been very set in the past. Set in a specific job. When that specific job was liquidated and a job transfer shook my identity, I took assessment. This forced me to look at my skills and desires."

"When we moved to _____, my career was not available. In deciding on a new career, a degree is necessary."

"The reason I'm going to school now is because I found that a single woman cannot make a living on high school education level jobs. What triggered my return was the loss of what I considered a very "good" job. I was tired of jumping from one crummy job to another and I wanted something more."

Table 23 on the preceeding page contains the proportion of survey respondents who selected a particular barrier and trigger as very much a factor in delaying and triggering their return. An examination of the percentages of responses in this table yields the same basic results described above. The fact that the percentages in each cell are almost universally larger than in the previous table further suggests that job and family responsibilities play a very important role both in terms of delaying an adult's college entry and triggering their return to school.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Although a concerted effort was made to limit the scope of the study and the type of adult learner surveyed, analysis of the data still proved to be difficult. Adult degree seekers, like adult learners in general, enter or reenter college degree programs with the full range of job and family responsibilities. Their previous postsecondary educational experiences have also varied, along with the reasons they give for not finishing college earlier. Their reasons for returning range from wanting contact with people to getting a new job, and, not surprisingly, the catalyst or event which triggers their return also varied considerably for the adult student.

The eight statements below provide a brief summary of the major conclusions

drawn from this study. Each statement is supplemented by a brief narrative describing the statement in some detail. The list is not by any means intended to be exhaustive and there was no attempt to place them in any order of importance.

+ 1. In general, college degree programs attract adults who are between 25-34 years of age.

The fact that nearly three-fourths of the survey respondents fell within this age range may reflect what Levinson (1974) calls the "age 30 transition." For many people this is a period of time during which they are reexamining their goals in life. Consequently they may have decided to either change occupations completely or increase their efforts to advance in their present job.

+ 2. After age 35, women are much more likely to enroll in a college degree program than are men.

During the past decade women have been enrolling in college in ever increasing numbers. In 1980, among college students 35 years and over, women outnumbered men 2 to 1 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1981). In the present study, which was limited to undergraduate matriculants, women outnumbered men 3 to 1 in the 35+ age category. Results from the present study suggest that the significant difference in the proportion of men and women is probably due to the fact that women in general feel a great deal of responsibility toward their families. Consequently, the time of self-examination and the establishment of long term goals, for many women, comes somewhat later in life than it does for men. With the trend toward smaller families, women in their mid-thirties and early forties find that a great deal of free time lies ahead. Family responsibilities have decreased, their children are off to school and they are beginning to develop a number of interests outside of the homemaker role. Some women reported that they returned to school out of necessity because they needed to support themselves and their families while others

wanted the security which comes with a college degree and a well paying job should they lose their husband's income in the future.

+ 3. A significant majority of adult degree seekers must cope with job and family responsibilities in addition to attending school. Consequently, these factors play an important role in the adult student's decision to delay college entry and frequently trigger their return.

As indicated earlier, nearly two-thirds of the students surveyed were married and had children. In general, women were more likely to have children, particularly school-age children and were also more likely to be divorced. Forty-three percent of the adults had full-time jobs and 23% were employed part time. Men had heavier job responsibilities in that 60% of the men compared to 30% of the women were employed full time.

+ 4. Most adult degree seekers attend school part time and have attended a college or technical school prior to their current period of enrollment.

A significant majority (81%) of the returning adult students had some prior educational experience at the postsecondary level. Two-thirds are attending school part time (11 credits or less) and 62% had either Freshman or Sophomore standing at the time of the survey. When prior education and present educational status is compared across age, sex, marital status, and employment status, very few differences between groups emerge. Men and women across all age categories have similar educational backgrounds and class standing. Credit loads also do not vary by sex; however, there does appear, to be a strong relationship between employment status and credit load, namely, individuals employed full time almost always attend part time, while nearly three-fourths of the unemployed and part-time workers take twelve or more credits. Finally, there is a slight tendency for adult students in the post-45 year old category to attend school part time more often than younger adults.

Most adult students were "interested" in a college degree for some time. Few report they had never given it much thought before they actually enrolled. Results from the survey indicate that most adults have either been

to college at some time in the past or considered enrolling in college for some time. Generally speaking, it appears that individuals who return to school after age 25 are in the midst of reevaluating their lives and establishing new priorities. For example, one student reported, "I always wanted to attend college and get a degree in accounting and now that my family responsibilities are lessened I can do it." Another student stated, "Although I always intended to return to school some day, I kept delaying my return due to career opportunities. Last spring frustration with my job convinced me that it is time to finish my degree."

+ 5. Among degree seeking adults, family and job responsibilities are the most frequently cited reasons for delaying the completion of their degree.

Results from the present study strongly support the contention that responsibilities associated with an adult's job and family have a direct impact on whether or not an adult returns to college to complete a degree. Returning to college requires a reallocation of time and money which has a direct impact on the "significant others" in an adult's life. The long-term benefits of having a degree must be weighed against the short-term negative effects of being a student. Will I have enough time to spend with my family? What will we have to give up in order to pay tuition? Will I and/or my family be able to "get by" if I quit my job or reduce the number of hours I work? Unlike "traditional" students who complete their degrees at age 21 or 22, most returning adults had previously given job and family a higher priority than education. New priorities needed to be established before they could make the decision to return to school.

+ 6. A significant majority of the adults who return to college do so to improve their job and career opportunities.

The goal of improving career opportunities which in turn will lead to a more satisfying, higher paying job is perhaps the most frequently occurring

theme to emerge from the questionnaire. Although adults report that other goals such as "simply to learn" and "to have the satisfaction of having a degree" are also very important, when forced to choose, a significant majority of adults cite a career related goal as their primary one. Results from the multiple choice questions regarding goals are strongly reinforced by many of the additional comments volunteered by the survey respondents. One woman wrote, "At age 18 I married. Then I became very busy raising eight children. At age 41 I decided to return to school. I was then working as a nurse's aide and loved my job, but my husband was ill, and I wanted a career to fall back on if he could no longer work." Other students were more concise stating, "My goal is to be self-supporting but in a job I am interested in," "I feel that getting my degree in nursing is my best chance for mobility" and "I am working in a job that I like very much but can't expand without education."

+ 7. The events which trigger an adult to enroll in degree programs are very diverse, however, circumstances related to an individual's job or family account for a significant majority of the reasons cited for returning to school.

An analysis of the responses to the objective portion of the survey indicates that over half of the respondents were triggered by either job dissatisfaction or changes in their family situation. Specifically, 30% cited job related factors such as job dissatisfaction and loss of job or change in family responsibilities as the primary triggering event. Comments offered on the free response portion of the survey further reinforces the fact that changes in the adult's job and family situation triggered a return. Some typical comments include, "I always wanted to finish school when my children were all in school, when they all went to school I decided to go" and "After six years of being a secretary I was very dissatisfied and felt the need for a big change."

+ 8. Finally, there does appear to be a strong relationship between the reasons given for delaying college entry and the events which trigger an adult's return to school.

The overall picture that emerges from the survey is that most adult students had been "would-be" learners for some time but did not continue their education either because family or job responsibilities consumed their time and financial resources or because of a lack of clearly defined goals. Later when family responsibilities diminished or if financial resources became available, many adults were prompted to reexamine their life goals, giving the attainment of a degree a higher priority. A second group of students returned when rather sudden, unexpected events occurred which made a college degree almost a necessity. For example, many women were divorced and as one respondent stated, "I became responsible for the support of a family which is nearly impossible on clerical pay." Others suffered accidents or serious illnesses which required that they change jobs.

Regardless of the diverse triggers cited, in general, adult students who reported that job and/or family responsibilities delayed completion of their degree were also triggered by either job dissatisfaction or the lessening of family responsibilities. The availability of funds was also frequently mentioned as a trigger by many individuals who indicated that cost was a barrier to earlier enrollment. Encouragement from family and friends, etc. was also an important determining factor to those individuals who had not been encouraged to continue their education after high school.

In short, situations or events associated with job and family frequently played a major role in the causes and timing of enrollment in a college degree program.

IMPLICATIONS

From the early stages of the project a major goal has been to use the

information obtained from the study to formulate some general guidelines for policy and practice. The guidelines are based primarily on the data collected, however, specific details are also based on information gathered through other projects conducted by the Wisconsin Assessment Center including consultation with individuals who provide information and counseling to adult students who may have already implemented some of the procedures discussed below. The suggestions are offered with the realization that any policy decision regarding the adult student must be made within the context of a particular institution including the availability of funds and other resources. Moreover, none of the statements are offered with a "money-back guarantee" and certainly none are expected to attract or retain vast numbers of adult students. They are merely offered with the hope that adult students can be better served.

1. New programs and services for adult students should be based on identified needs. Once this is accomplished an institution should articulate what services it must provide and can provide the adult student. Specific steps can then be taken to offer services to the largest number of adults. Specifically, the adult student may find the following services useful: (1) career and educational counseling; (2) placement services; (3) personal/family counseling; (4) day care/evening care; (5) assessment of prior learning; and (6) evening hours for counseling and registration.

2. Career planning should be offered to prospective adult students. In addition to making occupational interest inventories available to interested adults, the prospective student could be provided with counseling and other assistance regarding: (1) possible career options; (2) degree alternatives; (3) cost and expense information; (4) occupational outlook information; (5) licensing/certification requirements; (6) complete admissions requirements and procedures; and (7) an orientation to

the college or university, particularly any degree requirements which must be met by all students.

3. Institutions should make a concerted effort to enlist the support of business and community organizations. Institutional support from these groups can enhance the reputation of the college or university, increase credibility and improve communication flow. Many employers may also provide the additional encouragement (psychological and financial) needed to trigger a return to school. Internal polling of these organizations could also be used to help determine whether particular degrees or certificates would be of interest and may open the doors to more flexible class schedules and locations.

4. The availability of programs, class schedules and other special services should be extensively advertised. Advertisement, free of university jargon, should be targeted to certain groups, particularly to those who already have had some college, women whose children are in school, men between 25-34 and women over 35. The job or career benefits of obtaining a degree should also be emphasized.

5. Former graduates and students currently enrolled could be used as promoters of specific programs for the institution. Individuals selected should truly represent the students being served and not just the "stars" of a particular institution. An effort should be made to select students who would provide a number of different role models for men and women, married, divorced and single persons, with and without children, full-time workers, part-time workers and dedicated homemakers.

6. Finally, institutions should strive as much as possible to offer courses during evening hours and on weekends. It appears to be particularly important to make it possible for an adult student to actually get a

degree by taking only evening or weekend courses. A particular institution could offer either a liberal studies or liberal arts degree or might want to make it possible to complete a specialized major by taking evening or weekend courses (e.g. a BSN, business, computer science, engineering, etc.).

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APPENDIX

The Survey Form

uwgb

University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Green Bay, Wisconsin 54302

Wisconsin Assessment Center

October 1, 1981

Dear UW- Student:

In order to better understand and serve the needs of our adult students, the Urban Corridor Consortium Task Force on Part-time and Commuter Students, in cooperation with the Wisconsin Assessment Center, located at UW-Green Bay is conducting a study to gather information about the educational background of adults and the reasons they are attending college after being away from school for a period of time.

Since you are currently enrolled at UW- you are in a position to assist us in this investigation. We know completing a questionnaire can be a nuisance, particularly for students with a hectic schedule. However, we value your input and hope that you will be able to spare a few minutes within the next couple of days to complete and return the questionnaire.

All information you provide will be held in the strictest confidence, and you do not have to answer any question you find objectionable. Your questionnaire has been coded to allow us to follow-up on nonrespondents, but otherwise your form is anonymous. A postpaid return envelope has been enclosed for your convenience.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Timothy J. Sewall

Timothy J. Sewall
Assistant Director

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN ADULT STUDENT SURVEY

Please read each question carefully and check (✓) your answer clearly.

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1. SEX: O male O female

2. AGE: _____

3. What is your present marital status?

   O Single/Never married
   O Married
   O Separated/Divorced
   O Widowed

4. How many children do you have? ____

   (a) Ages of children: _____ _____
   _____ _____ _____ _____

   (b) Please circle the ages of children still living at home with you.

5. What best describes your present employment status?

   O Unemployed
   O Full-time Homemaker
   O Part-time (20 hrs. or less/week)
   O Full-time

6. Job title (if applicable):

   _____

7. How much education did you complete prior to your current period of enrollment at UW- ?

   O Some high school
   O High school graduate (or G.E.D.)
   O Some technical school
   O Associate degree: technical school
   O Some college
   O Associate degree: college
   O Four year college degree
   O Some graduate courses

8. In what year did you graduate from high school or receive a GED?

   Year: _____

9. How many credits are you currently taking? _____

10. What is your present year in college?

    O Freshman O Sophomore
    O Junior O Senior
    O Other (specify) _____

11. Is this semester the first time you have ever taken college courses for credit?

    O Yes (GO TO #16)

    O No (GO TO QUESTION #12 BELOW)

12. In what year did you FIRST take courses for credit at a college or university (including UW-)?

    Year: 19 _____

    (a) During your first semester did you attend school part-time or full-time?

    O Part-time (11 sem credits or less)
    O Full-time

13. Many adults start college and then drop out for one or more semesters. Before your current period of enrollment, when did you last take courses for credit at a college or university?

    Year: 19 _____

14. Did you ever take a college course for credit as a nondegree seeking or "Special" student?

    O Yes, in 19 _____ (Year)

    O No (GO TO #16)

15. In what year did you "officially" become a degree seeking student?

    Year: 19 _____

    (a) During your first semester did you attend school part-time or full-time?

    O Part-time (11 sem. credits or less)
    O Full-time

16. You are currently enrolled in college, but obviously delayed your college study for one or more reasons. Below is a list of reasons often given by people for delaying their college work. For each reason check the circle that best describes to what extent it was a reason for your delay. (Please mark one answer for EACH reason.)

	Very Much	A Little	Not at All
a. Attended a technical or vocational school	0	0	0
b. Enlisted or drafted into military service	0	0	0
c. Family responsibilities (marriage, children, etc.)	0	0	0
d. Funds not available	0	0	0
e. Illness (personal, family)	0	0	0
f. Lack of encouragement (from spouse, family, etc)	0	0	0
g. Lack of interest or motivation	0	0	0
h. Wanted to work/had to work	0	0	0
i. Lack of information about college	0	0	0
j. Other, please specify _____	0	0	0

17. If you were forced to choose the single most important reason from the above list for NOT enrolling in college or completing your degree earlier which would it be? (Please check only ONE. Guess, if not sure.)

(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f) (g) (h) (i) (j)

18. People attend college or pursue a degree for many different reasons. Below is a list of reasons often given by people for going to college. For each reason mark how important it is for you. (Please mark one answer for EACH reason.)

VI=Very Important; SI=Somewhat Important; NI=Not Important

	VI	SI	NI
a. Simply to learn	0	0	0
b. To achieve independence and a sense of identity	0	0	0
c. To advance in my present career	0	0	0
d. To develop a new career	0	0	0
e. To get away from the routine of daily living	0	0	0
f. To make contact with other people	0	0	0
g. To have the satisfaction of having a degree	0	0	0
h. Other, please specify _____	0	0	0

19. If you were forced to choose from the above list the single most important reason for enrolling in college at the present time which would it be? (Please check only ONE. Guess, if not sure.)

(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f) (g) (h)

20. For some period of time you were not taking college courses and now you are. Thinking back to when you decided for sure to return to college, to what extent did each of the following factors influence <u>your</u> decision to enroll at UW- (Please mark one answer for EACH reason.)

	Very Much	A Little	Not at All
a. Children entered school (kindergarten, college, etc.)	0	0	0
b. Dissatisfied with job	0	0	0
c. Family or marital problems	0	0	0
d. Funds became available	0	0	0
e. Received encouragement from spouse, family, etc.	0	0	0
f. Lost job	0	0	0
g. Moved to this community	0	0	0
h. Obtained specific information about UW-	0	0	0
i. Serious illness or death in family	0	0	0
j. Other, specify _____	0	0	0

21. If you were forced to choose, which <u>one</u> of the factors above would you say had the MOST influence in your decision to return to school? (Check only ONE. Guess, if not sure.)

(a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f) (g) (h) (i) (j)

22. Please feel free to make additional comments about what delayed your college attendance, your goals for attending and what "triggered" your return to school at the present time.

YOUR COOPERATION IN COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IS VERY MUCH APPRECIATED.

THANK YOU !!!!